MESOPOTAMIA:
THE KEY TO THE FUTURE

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MESOPOTAMIA :
THE KEY TO THE FUTURE

PART I.

MESOPOTAMIA : ITS ANCIENT GLORIES.

MESOPOTAMIA and its adjacent plains have been associated with the most important turning-points of history. Geographically situated at the heart of the Eastern Hemisphere, these lands have frequently played a leading part in the world's activities. They have contained for millenniums the capital cities of great world-empires. They have been closely connected with the most thrilling epochs of history, and, once again, by reason of the Bagdad railway schemes, Mesopotamia controls the main currents of this unprecedented commotion and holds the key to the whole world's future.

Many kindly friends have often, in jest, called me "the Rural Dean of the Garden of Eden," in order to remind me that man's earthly paradise was situated somewhere in my Mesopotamian parish ; but I protest that

I have never seen it, for, under the Turkish regime, that primitive paradise was unfortunately nowhere to be found.

I met, however, in Bagdad a clever impostor, a wily tobacconist, who closed up his shop and travelled extensively through Europe and America, collecting large sums of money from gullible Westerners by posing as the famous "Discoverer of Noah's Ark and the Golden Mountains of the Moon." These also I have never seen ; but, apart from all spurious claims and fantastic titles, it is nevertheless true that Mesopotamia cradled the human race, nurtured it for centuries, until a new era was introduced by the Flood incidents, which are recorded not only in the Hebrew Scriptures, but also in interesting cuneiform inscriptions that have been unearthed by archæologists in Mesopotamia.

This is essentially a land of origins. The oldest sea route in the world, utilised by the first navigators of the high seas, was the Persian Gulf; and the numerous mounds at Bahrain remind us of the world's debt to the Phœnicians, who gave us the alphabet and the earliest system of weights and measures, and who originally migrated to Syria from the shores of the Persian Gulf and the ports of Mesopotamia. From this land also the Hebrew race took its rise when Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees and settled in Canaan.

This is the home of the mighty Nimrod, the earliest of hunters, who founded Calneh or Nippur, where I was privileged to see some of the most ancient Assyrian treasures being excavated by American archæologists. Oft-times have I travelled from Busrah on British ships conveying hundreds of Arab ponies to India, when I recalled the fact that horses were introduced into Mesopotamia 4,000 years ago by the Kassites, who, largely on account of their superior mobility, were able to conquer a country whose inhabitants till then had used only asses and cattle for transport.

Philologists may rejoice while others will weep over the fact that in this plain of Shinar the Confusion of Tongues and the multiplication of dialects took place at a time when cuneiform characters became confounded and the dwellers in Mesopotamia were driven forth to colonise the continents.

But Babylon was also the mother of astronomy, and to her ancient system of dividing the day we are indebted for the twelve divisions on the dials of our clocks.

The influence of Hammurabi's famous laws has penetrated down the ages into the legal codes of modern times through the intricate systems of Greek and Roman legislators.

The most curious ruin in Mesopotamia is the unsightly mound of Akker Kuf, near Bagdad, connected, we are told, with the

remote period of King Kurigalzu, who reigned in Babylon about the time when Moses was leading the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. Those ancient monarchies of Babylonia, Assyria, Parthia, Media, and Persia were great and powerful in their day, exercising a paramount influence for many centuries over the major part of the world's politics, so that no other portion of the earth's surface has more constantly affected the history of mankind, or harboured for so long the forces that moved the world, than this land of Mesopotamia.

The extensive ruins of Assur, north of Tikrit ; the mounds of Nineveh, on the bank of the Tigris opposite to the modern city of Mosul ; the ruins of Babylon, on the Euphrates ; and the arch at Ctesiphon, all testify to the old-world glories of this wonderful land.

For nearly twenty years excavators have been busily attempting to uncover the brick-built palaces and temples of Nebuchadnezzar ; but more than twenty years will be required to clear away the debris from the buried marble monuments of Nineveh.

Nebuchadnezzar only revived the more ancient glories of Babylon when he made it the greatest city in the world. He was a remarkable builder of magnificent temples and palaces ; but he also extended his military conquests over Syria, Palestine, and

Egypt. When Cyrus the Persian shattered the Neo-Babylonian monarchy he found an enormous reservoir to the north of the capital, into which he drained the great river and entered the city through the dry bed of the Euphrates.

The name of Cyrus recalls the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity and the achievements of such remarkable men as Nehemiah and Ezra. There are probably 80,000 Arabic-speaking Jews now resident in Mesopotamia, who guard with reverence the traditional tombs of Joshua the High Priest near the city of Bagdad, of the prophet Ezekiel near the banks of the Euphrates, and of Ezra the scribe on the Tigris near Kurnah.

It was Cyrus who conquered and captured the famous Crœsus with his fabulous wealth. It was his son, Cambyses, who brought from Mesopotamia an army that snatched Egypt from the Pharaohs. Darius, his successor, bridged the Hellespont, and was defeated by the Greeks at Marathon, while his son, Xerxes, who is thought to be the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, is reported to have mobilised and maintained in the field an army of five million men, gathered from India, Armenia, Persia, and Mesopotamia. He, too, bridged and crossed the famous Dardanelles; he fought with Leonidas at Thermopylæ; he burned Athens; and only

retired to Mesopotamia after his navy was defeated at the battle of Salamis.

In every school where ancient Greek is taught the pupils are thrilled with the exploits of Xenophon, who extricated the ten thousand from the plains of Mesopotamia and led them towards Erzeroum and Trebizond, back to Greece.

Alexander the Great routed the Persians near Arbela, where, in the miserable modern Erbil, I, too, once fought all night with an army of ravenous cats and voracious vermin that devoured my breakfast and drove me at dawn from the dirtiest khan in Mesopotamia.

On his return from India, Alexander chose the banks of the Euphrates for the capital city of his contemplated world-empire, but before his plans were completed he died at Babylon. His successors, who built Seleucia and adorned Diarbekr with beautiful buildings of costly marble and porphyry, succumbed to the rising power of Rome.

Mark Antony failed in B.C. 33 to acquire the Asiatic treasures he sought for in Palmyra, and met with disaster at the hands of the Parthians, who founded Ctesiphon, the capital of Mesopotamia for nearly six centuries. The Parthians supported the Palmyreans till their city was destroyed by Aurelian, who captured the brave and beautiful Queen Zenobia on the banks of the Euphrates.

Persia and Rome struggled for supremacy

in Mesopotamia for nearly four centuries. Trajan, the conqueror of Jerusalem, captured Ctesiphon from the Parthians, and advanced a Roman army for the first and only time to the shores of the Persian Gulf; but he failed to take Hatra, a remarkable city—the home of architecture—about fifty miles south-west of Nineveh, now a comparatively unknown site, where are some of the best-preserved ruins I have seen in Mesopotamia.

Seleucia has completely disappeared, and the great arch at Ctesiphon is all that remains of the wonderful palace of Chosroes II, who was the last and the most remarkable monarch of the Persian Sassanian dynasty. Mesopotamia was still a glorious country when Khalid conquered it for the Arabs and Islam, for ten millions of people then flourished in these well-irrigated plains, and nine-tenths of its fertile soil was brought under cultivation by the Chosroes, while Bagdad, under the Arabs, subsequently became the wealthiest and most civilised city in the world, with nearly two million inhabitants in its palmy days.

Mesopotamia is a land of holy places and sacred memories to the three hundred millions of Mohammedans in the world. There is a magnificent mosque at Kazmain, where two gilded domes cover the tombs of eminent Imams; there is another beautiful mosque at Samarra. These are Shiah shrines; but

within a mile of Kazmain, on the left bank of the Tigris, is the stately Hanifi mosque of the Sunnis at Muaththam, and in Bagdad itself there is the famous mosque of the great commentator Sheikh Abd ul Kadir, visited by devotees from the far distant Morocco. There are many other mosques and tombs of minor importance, but which are nevertheless well known throughout the Moslem world, such as the tomb of Mohammed's barber, Salman Pâk, within a stone's throw of the ruined arch of Ctesiphon. There are two sacred places, however, near the banks of the Euphrates which are second only in importance to the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina. These are the holy cities of Kerbela and Nejif, where were enacted the tragedies commemorated by the Shiahs everywhere, and in India by Sunnis and Shiahs alike, in the Passion play and festival of the tenth day of Moharram. Ali, the fourth Khalif of Islam, is buried at Nejif, and the disputes which arose concerning his successor were those that rent the followers of the prophet into two great sects of Sunnis and Shiahs, and caused the death of Hosein, whose tomb at Kerbela is regarded as the most sacred spot on earth by one-half of the Moslem world. Nearly 100,000 pilgrims from Persia and India pass annually through Bagdad to Kerbela and Nejif, carrying with them thousands of embalmed corpses for burial in the sacred soil around these holy shrines.

The fascinating stories of "The Arabian Nights" impressed us even in our childhood with the fairy splendour of the Golden Prime of Haroun al-Raschid when Bagdad was the capital of a vast Mohammedan dominion; when Busrah and Kufa were rival centres of learning; when Arab scholars were the first teachers of algebra and chemistry; when the light of learning was kept aglow in the East while barbarian Huns desolated the lands of Europe.

In those enlightened days the Moslem Arabs did not massacre but freely fraternised with the Christians, whose patriarch at Bagdad, with twenty-five primates under him, guided the fortunes of many flourishing churches established between Edessa and Pekin. The Nestorian monument found in the Great Wall of China and the half a million Eastern Christians in South India testify to the activities of those early Mesopotamian Churches.

The Arab philosophers of the Abbaside period persuaded the Christian theologians to translate into Arabic the works of Aristotle and Plato, so that in subsequent years, while the Moorish kingdom was established in Spain, these Arabic versions were retranslated into the Romance languages of Europe, and the search for the original Greek writings led up to the Renaissance, which produced the Reformation.

Similarly, the discovery of America can be traced back to movements that took their rise in Mesopotamia. The Euphrates Valley had contained for centuries the "Royal Roads" from West to East, and Charlemagne is known to have maintained friendly communications with Haroun al-Raschid; but, with the passing of the Abbasides, the rise of the Turks, and the fall of Constantinople, the world's highway was so completely blocked that Columbus set out to seek a safer route to the East, when he suddenly discovered America.

Jenghis Khan, Hulagu, and Tamerlane the Turk of Samarkand were irresistible conquerors of a villainous and savage type, who ruthlessly destroyed the ancient glories of Mesopotamia.

Their devastating instincts were infused into the Turkish tribes, whom they drove westward from the regions of the great Gobi plateau. Some of the Turkomans became janizaries to the Moslem Khalifs. They in time usurped the authority of their masters, and founded the Turkish dynasty at Ghazni, till fresh hordes from Khorasan established the authority of the Seljuks; and, finally, at Angora, Ertoghrul, the leader of a homeless Turkoman tribe, founded the empire of the Ottomans, who have completed the ravages of Jenghis Khan and made Mesopotamia the most desolate country on earth.

PART II.

MESOPOTAMIA: ITS DREARY DESOLATION.

KURNAH, the traditional Sumerian site of man's primeval paradise, is situated at the southern extremity of Mesopotamia, 100 miles up the Shat el Arab from the Persian Gulf, where the Tigris meets a branch of the River Euphrates.

My heart sank within me when the captain of the steamer introduced me, as we journeyed from Busrah, to the boundary of my new parish. "Well," I said, "if this is the Garden of Eden portion of my district, what will the rest of it be like?"

The natural prospect was decent enough, but the miserable dwellings on the banks were built of mud. By the side of a tall flagstaff there was a temporary structure of reed mats, which the captain informed me was the Municipal Town Hall of this Turkish paradise. The "Mayor" had but one duty to perform —he collected a tax levied upon every fruit-bearing palm. A bright green nubbak tree was declared to be the "Tree of Knowledge," but the captain confided in me that his father had planted it thirty years before. The people seemed desperately poor; they cried out to

the passengers, who threw them bread and oranges from the deck of the steamer. The dresses of the natives were truly primitive. Most of the children were brilliantly clad in nothing more than olive oil and a smile. One can sympathise with the British soldier in camp with our troops at Kurnah, who, after a sleepless night, exclaimed to his fellow in the tent : "Oh, Bill, I don't know how Adam and Eve got on in this place, with all these mosquitoes buzzing about!" "No, indeed," said Bill; "it wouldn't take a flaming sword to drive me out of the Garden of Eden."

The alluvial deposit brought down by the two great rivers for hundreds of years has provided these extensive plains with the best soil possible for agricultural purposes. I travelled on one occasion for ten days between Bagdad and Mosul, passing through Samarra and Tikrit. It happened to be a particularly favourable season, just after the winter rains, when the country was covered for a few weeks with grass and wild flowers. Our horses were literally in clover, and at one spot, where we pitched our tent for the night, we picked nineteen varieties of wild flowers within a few yards of the tent door. Yet nothing strikes the traveller so much as the immense quantity of thorns and thistles that cover the greater part of Mesopotamia and Asiatic Turkey; millions of acres of good arable land are overrun with thorns and

weeds, indicative of the grossest possible neglect.

The whole country has, likewise, been practically deforested; the very roots of trees have been sold at 40s. a ton to provide fuel for the population. When travelling once from Kifri to Mosul I noted the fact that for a distance of seventy miles, where the soil was capable of producing the fairest vegetation, we passed but one solitary tree.

Mesopotamia is now an ideal entomologists' paradise, for nothing seemed to flourish so profusely as the vermin and insect life. I caught sixty scorpions one winter in the ground floor of my Bagdad house. I have attacked centipedes in my drawing-room and have shaken them out of my blankets. Mosquitoes were numerous enough, but the sand-flies were everywhere; the common house-fly attacked you in battalions, and was gifted with a more piercing bite than the average mosquito. Some one has truly said that "the tiniest little insect in Mesopotamia night and day faithfully does its bit." When in summer, according to custom, we dined upon the roof of the house, our table was often covered with a multitude of winged insects, varying in size from the largest beetle to the smallest may-fly.

On account of the neglected banks, there were frequent floods and unsavoury swamps where myriads of insects breed. I was once

lost for hours, while being punted in a native boat, amid the tall reeds of one of these swamps that covered an area of twenty-five square miles.

In 1895 an unprecedented rise in the river destroyed some of the banks to the north of Bagdad, with the result that four hundred square miles of arable land was covered with deep water. The city was an island for months. Twelve hundred brick-built dwellings collapsed, and from two to six feet of water appeared in the *serdabs* or cellars of every house. Hundreds of Arabs lost their lives, many mud and mat villages were swept away, while thousands of sheep perished.

One strange result of these continuous floods was the plague of frogs. They literally swarmed by the million in the swamps and pools. They were possessed of an astonishing variety of voices, so that you could hear their squeaking, squealing, singing, and croaking long before you came in sight of the reeds or could smell the odours of their watery home.

Travelling on one occasion from Bagdad to Babylon, I calculated upon reaching my first stopping-place at the end of a five-hours ride, but we suddenly came across an unexpected flood which necessitated a detour that lengthened our journey by three hours. I was desperately hungry, for the food was locked up in the mule trunks, and we dared not stop

lest we should be benighted in a roadless and robber-infested plain. We reached, at length, a pontoon bridge, and were received by polite Turkish officials, who refreshed us with black coffee and levied an enormous tax, which we gladly paid for the privilege of escaping from the flooded plain.

On arrival at the caravanserai that night we overheard the Arab muleteers cursing the Turkish officials, who, in view of the busy pilgrim season which had just begun, took advantage of a rise of the rivers, breached their banks, flooded the pilgrim road, farmed out the taxes of a new pontoon bridge, and pocketed thousands of pounds till the floods subsided, for great were the spoils which the Turkish governors shared with the robber bands who looted the benighted caravans that failed to reach the bridge before dusk.

The great River Euphrates became unnavigable through the folly of the Turks, and the river bed at Babylon was often absolutely dry. In order to irrigate some Crown lands property, foolish Turkish officials opened a watercourse some miles north of Babylon in such a way that the bulk of the waters created the new Hindiah Canal and flooded an enormous area of once cultivable land. Thousands of pounds were annually spent on a feeble attempt to repair the damage that was done, until at last a British engineering firm was called in to erect the magnificent

barrage, which was completed a few months before the outbreak of war, and stands as a monument to the skill of British engineers. It began successfully to stem the waters of the Hindiah flood and drove back a fair portion of the stream into the original channel of the Euphrates, restoring prosperity to the ruined gardens of Babylon.

One could not but admire the energies of German archæologists who nobly supplemented the earlier efforts of British excavators in an attempt to preserve the ancient treasures of Mesopotamia. The Turks themselves preserved nothing, and have left no monuments of their own behind them. There is not a single building—not even a ruin—a canal, a bridge, or a solitary tree to which we could point as a worthy monument to the centuries of Turkish occupation of Mesopotamia. This most fertile region of the earth that enriched the inhabited world for thousands of years has been gradually reduced to dust and ashes, and even the precious monuments of its ancient glories have suffered from the ruthless folly and vandalism of the Turk. The authorities permitted the mounds of Babylon to be used as a quarry, and the well-made bricks of Nebuchadnezzar can be seen in the older houses of Bagdad and the small towns on the Euphrates.

In 1898 I stood before two marble monuments of winged Assyrian lions amid the

ruins of ancient Nineveh; but on a second visit, four years later, I noticed that one of them had been broken to pieces. The miller close by wanted some stone for the repair of his mill, so he gave a bribe to the Turkish guardian, and the marble lion, worth hundreds of pounds, was demolished for a few piastres.

Ctesiphon has also suffered from gross neglect. Forty years ago both wings of the façade were standing by the sides of the wonderful arch. But the ruin was of no account to the Turk, and the bricks within reach at the base were extracted and disposed of in return for small bribes to petty officials, so that one of the wings eventually gave way, and the fallen material was used for the paltry structures at Salman Pâk.

Mesopotamia contains many underground rivers of valuable petroleum which here and there finds its way to the surface. I was once travelling down the Tigris from Mosul upon a raft of inflated sheepskins when, near Gyarah, we came to a black rock protruding from mid-stream, out of which there flowed a stream of oil almost as thick as one's wrist, polluting the river for many miles below.

The ridiculous efforts made by the Turks to utilise a minimum quantity of this valuable oil may provide a ludicrous reason for the Turkish claim to a place, in this twentieth century, amongst the civilised nations of Europe.

Mesopotamia has an evil name amongst medical specialists as being the home of the bubonic plague, which has often spread to other lands from these dreaded regions, and in 1831 carried off half the population of Bagdad. Our British Mission doctors have been the only medical men who dared, on three separate occasions within the last twenty years, when the Turks fled from the city, to stay behind and grapple with the desolating ravages of cholera. I once accompanied our doctor to a large village near Mosul, where he found 60 per cent. of the villagers suffering from ophthalmia, and at least 10 per cent. of them had lost their sight. There was not a single municipal hospital or dispensary in the whole vilayet.

It is impossible to adequately describe the puerility which characterised the acts of quarantine officials. It may be that some of the chief officials honestly formulated rules for safeguarding the health of the inhabitants, but certainly, in actual practice, the elaborate quarantine arrangements were carried out with the sole object of blackmailing travellers and filling the pockets of officials. The lazarettos were death-traps and the hotbeds of epidemics.

The Turkish Customs were of a like character. The Government Treasury suffered from the absurdities of a system that farmed out the privilege of receiving bribes from

merchants and travellers who brought goods into the country. There were custom-houses everywhere; the officials at Busrah would board the steamers and worry the passengers for paltry presents. Then, again, at Bagdad another set of officials had to be similarly satisfied, and so on at every large town in Turkey.

My valuable library was the bane of the Bagdad censor and an awful grief to my innocent heart when first I wandered abroad. Six hundred precious books were strewn for weeks about the floor of the censor's office and frequently trampled underfoot. The young Jewish interpreter was supposed to read them through and scrawl his name, without a capital letter, over the front page of every volume before it could be passed. Week by week he came to my house beaming with smiles, expecting a few silver coins, which added considerably to the facility with which he reviewed my scholastic treasures in many hitherto unknown tongues. A brand-new copy of the "Historical Geography of the Holy Land," with seventy other similar valuable books, were pilfered from me by the Chairman of the Council of Education. In spite of much correspondence, and even an appeal to Constantinople, such dangerous geographical volumes could not possibly be allowed to enter the enlightened city of Bagdad.

I opened book stores in Mosul and in Bagdad, and sent my agent on a long journey to Beyrout that he might purchase stock from the different publishing houses of that great Turkish city. I determined to sell nothing that was not officially permitted or produced in the Turkish Empire itself. Hundreds of books, however, were purloined by the censor, and amongst them three dozen copies of "The Arabian Nights' Entertainment," in Arabic, published by a Beyrout press, were ruthlessly destroyed, so the Turkish officials told me; but I saw them later on being sold by my native rivals in the bazaar.

I opened the only British schools in Mesopotamia after fifteen months of wearisome conflicts with the Council of Education. One of my bosom friends and a companion in adversity, whom I frequently met at the Education Office, was the headmaster of the Turkish Military School, a refined Turk of reforming tendencies and enlightened views. He did his best for his country; but his sufferings at the hands of the standardised Turk during the fifteen years I was intimately acquainted with him would fill a volume of a deeply depressing type.

Mesopotamia provided a striking example of the whole corrupt and foolish system of Turkish civil administration.

The Wali Governor bought his appointment in Constantinople. On arrival at Mosul,

Bagdad, or Busrah, his chief concern was to recoup his impoverished purse. The local chiefs, minor officials, and all those who had paid for his predecessor's friendship, must now hurry up and bring fresh presents or fall into disfavour and be deposed.

A tour of the vilayet would be undertaken as soon as possible, not for administrative purposes, but chiefly for finding out what means there were of squeezing the sheikhs and the populace. The prisons at such times were filled not with criminals, but with recalcitrant chiefs who, for some reason or other, had failed to produce the dues which the Governor had imposed.

The construction of roads, railways, and works of public utility was impossible by such methods. They took too long to bring adequate remuneration to the promoters of such schemes, and Turkish governors were being constantly changed through the appearance at the Sublime Porte of a higher bidder for the coveted post.

The average Turkish official found it more convenient to make terms with the ruffians of the Empire and the robber bands. The truly respectable Arabs looked with disdain upon the Maadani tribes of Lower Mesopotamia, who were expert thieves, as the British troops learned to their cost, when so often blankets, bedding, crockery, and saddlery took to themselves legs, and even a

marquee under *force majeure* walked away one night from the British camp.

It paid the Turkish officials to share the spoils with these uncouth gipsies. They could easily pretend abhorrence of their crimes, and when, by a stroke of good luck, the Arabs robbed a consul instead of a pious pilgrim the Turks could display their zeal for righteousness by hurrying forth with a punitive expedition and depriving the poor robbers of their promised share of all last season's loot.

When approaching Kerkuk on one occasion, we suddenly espied a band of the terrible Hamavand. The zaptiah warned me to hide my money at the bottom of my Wellington boots, to put on my blue goggles and sun helmet so as to look as dignified a European as possible, while he himself rode ahead to parley with the robber chief. Silently and solemnly we approached the band of over fifty well-armed horsemen. Suddenly the chief's son dashed out from amongst the others and came galloping on towards me. He raised his rifle, and I feared the Turkish zaptiah had failed to come to terms with the chief, so that we were doomed to be robbed. It was only when the muzzle of his gun was within a couple of yards of my breast that he suddenly burst into laughter, swerved round, and exclaimed that he was only showing me what a clever man he was,

and that because I was an Englishman his father's men would do us no harm.

When we reached the city we found the Kaimakam or Deputy-Governor had been practically a prisoner in the Government House for a few days as these Hamavand had peppered his doors and windows with rifle fire because he had dared to claim too large a share of the spoils acquired by their recent ravages on passing caravans.

The inhabitants of Mosul habitually referred to Mustapha Pasha as "The Pig with a Gun," for the story is current that a wild boar desolated the gardens around a certain village. The terrified villagers were unable to deal with their enemy. They hired a famous hunter, who arrived with his gun ready for the fray. At length he sighted the boar, which made a desperate dash at the hunter, who funked the situation, turned to flee, was overtaken by the boar, which caught the strap of the gun with its tusk, and dashed past with the rifle hanging around its neck. The villagers angrily exclaimed: "We paid you to deliver us from the pig that ravaged our crops, but now you have left us a pig with a gun!"

Mustapha Pasha was a terror to travellers and the inhabitants of the country for many miles north of Mosul. The Turkish authorities, who bleed their subjects with excessive taxation, were unable to suppress the

marauder, so they elevated him to the rank of a pasha, and enrolled his tribe of Kurdish ruffians into the ranks of the regular army with the dignity of the famous Hamidieh.

I have often listened to the bitterest complaints launched by all sections of the population against the Turkish tax-collectors. A village was ordered to pay one-tenth of its produce to the Government. The tax-collectors, with their escort, were billeted on the villagers for weeks. Worthless receipts were frequently foisted upon the chiefs, the numbers were constantly tampered with, with the net result that the greater part of the village produce was appropriated by the tax-collectors, and the amount that was left to the villagers was barely sufficient to clothe them in rags and to enable them to keep body and soul together.

I reached the Moslem village of Deli Abbas on one occasion just a few hours after the arrival of the tax-collectors and their military escort. We could find no shelter in the town as every khan and vacant room was occupied. In a back street we were advised to hammer at the door of a closed shop. Some of the neighbours told us that the owner was dead; but when they understood I was an Englishman, who has a reputation in Mesopotamia for paying his debts and keeping his plighted word, the dead man came to life again, and quietly placed his house at our disposal.

Turkish despotism has recorded its devilry on the pages of history in letters of blood; it has recently threatened to annihilate all its subject-races—the Jews of Palestine, the Arabs of Syria, the Druzes of the Lebanon; it has gloated over the woes of Armenia, the worst the world has ever heard; it has blighted the fairest lands of the Levant; it has made Mesopotamia the vale of misery. And will not countless myriads, for centuries to come, curse that fatal day when Turko-Prussian militarism combined to slaughter mankind by millions, to obliterate civilisation, and to drive humanity to a terrestrial hell?

PART III.

MESOPOTAMIA: ITS FUTURE PROSPECTS.

IT is no exaggeration to say that the whole world's peace, its progress, and prosperity hang largely upon the settlement of the many problems associated with this unique country of Mesopotamia.

(1) The development of its natural resources is a matter of some importance to multitudes. (2) The reopening of its ancient highways and the construction of great trunk railways to India and the Far East are matters of still greater importance, especially to the inhabitants of the Eastern Hemisphere. (3) But of the very deepest concern to all mankind is the prospect that in the settlement of Mesopotamia and the adjacent lands of Islam lies the possible doom of despotism and the dawn of a better era for the inhabitants of all five continents.

(1) Half a century may be needed for the reafforestation and recovery of a land like Palestine, but a very few years will suffice for restoring prosperity to Mesopotamia. Its rich alluvial plains are capable of immediate developments, irrigation schemes have already been thought out, and modern engineering skill can quickly transform this desolate land

into one of the finest wheat-fields in the world. Such a development alone would obviously benefit the working classes of Europe, for so great an increase in the world's wheat supplies would doubtless reduce the price of the peoples' bread. There are also excellent prospects for the cultivation of cotton, for the further extension of the remarkably fruitful date gardens and orange groves, for the breeding of ponies, and the rearing of Angora goats, which produce the famous silky wool so highly prized by manufacturers. The vast undeveloped oilfields are of priceless value at a time when our needs for this essential commodity have so enormously increased, when nearly every engine and all the most modern ships are being constructed to be run by oil fuel.

The Anglo-Saxon race for over a century has done much to foster improvements in these afflicted lands. Comfortable river steamers have regularly plied between Bagdad and Busrah, and along the Karun River to Ahwaz. Enormous quantities of dates, liquorice, wool, gum, valonia, and other products have been annually exported to the West by British and American merchants. Their commercial enterprises, carried on under exceptionally trying circumstances, greatly alleviated the abject poverty and squalor into which the Turks had driven the inhabitants of Mesopotamia.

British firms opened up the road from

Ahwaz into Persia, built the Hindiah barrage, introduced wool presses and ice factories, the earliest banks, and the latest machinery. They actually started, at their own expense, the camel post from Bagdad to Damascus, which was subsequently absorbed into the Turkish Postal Union.

The great oil-refining factory south of Busrah, with its wonderful wharves and other fine buildings that cover an area of more than two square miles, gives employment to nearly 7,000 men. The crude oil is brought from different wells through nearly 200 miles of pipe lines to the refinery at Abadan; and this remarkable establishment, which has financially benefited both the Government and people of Persia more than any other commercial undertaking in the country, is the fruit of long and laborious efforts made by a British syndicate in a land of sweltering summers where dangers and difficulties abound.

In less than two years British occupation has transformed Lower Mesopotamia into something approaching a paradise. The population of Busrah has enormously increased, and the inhabitants have never before been so well off. Excellent wharves have been erected on the banks of the great Shat-el-Arab for the ocean-going steamers which, under the Turkish regime, took days to accomplish what can now be done more

economically in a few hours. Every creek has been bridged in this "Venice of the East"; numbers of roads have been made; electric light has been installed; electric trams have invaded this long-neglected port; while an equally wonderful transformation is already taking place in the city of Bagdad. Thousands of men have repaired the river banks, the Euphrates is becoming navigable, and for the first time for centuries there have been no pernicious floods this year in Lower Mesopotamia. Two railway lines are spreading away to the north; an embankment of twenty miles long has recovered for agricultural purposes a marshy area of forty-eight square miles, where wheat-fields, vegetable gardens, dairy farms, and poultry farms, all under the care of professional farmers from India, are adequately providing for the needs of the British Forces in Mesopotamia and preparing to send food supplies to the British Isles. These astoundingly rapid changes are only illustrations of what can easily be done by a just and wise administration of a fertile country like Mesopotamia.

Such developments have their counterpart, on a much larger scale, in India, for the armed forces of Great Britain prove to be the harbingers of prosperity and peace, while the Turkish domination is everywhere coincident with ruin and decay.

There is one more point which ought to be

mentioned in this connection. It is surely of some interest to civilised peoples that the ancient monuments of Mesopotamia should be properly preserved. The land for centuries has been almost closed to travellers from the West; but if only the treasures of Babylon and Nineveh could be made as accessible as the treasures of Egypt, historians would gain a clearer insight into the records of the past, and the modern inhabitants of Mesopotamia would be enriched by the stream of tourists who would greatly value a visit to this wonderful land.

(2) Germany claims to be credited with the greatest discovery of modern times. One of her newspapers declared that "the year 1492, when America was discovered, and 1916, when the colossal idea of the new road to India was born, are dates which generations to come will regard as co-equal and epoch-making." Her claim is unjustified, though it is probably true that the reopening of this old highway will prove to be of equal importance to the world as the discovery of America by Columbus; but the credit of the so-called discovery belongs to Great Britain, who published plans for the opening up of the Euphrates Valley before Unified Germany was born.

I have an interesting photograph of a tablet erected near Busrah to the memory of a number of British officers who lost their lives near Anah at the time of the Euphrates

Expedition in 1836. It is also common knowledge that in 1851 we held concessions for the Euphrates Valley railway. The time, however, was not ripe for the development of this important route, for the retrograde Ottoman Empire blocked the way. We did our utmost to introduce reforms into Turkey, hoping that she would fall into line with European standards and co-operate with civilised nations in the development of an important area of the earth's surface. Germany's evil counsels, however, have tended to frustrate our efforts to secure the reform of Turkish administration, and, with the aid of her Bagdad railway schemes, Germany made a deliberate attempt to establish in the most strategic centre of the earth a formidable coalition of irresponsible despotic monarchies from the banks of the Elbe to the banks of the Indus. In spite of her attempts to wreck modern civilisation, the world will still be able to make a rapid recovery on one essential condition—that the new highways from West to East shall be kept free from the influence of despotisms that defy the rights of humanity and ignore the fundamental principles of our twentieth-century civilisation.

It was in the days of Queen Elizabeth, before the East India Company was started, that Aleppo—now the pivot of Germany's Asiatic schemes—became the centre of Britain's overseas commercial enterprises and

the headquarters of our great Levant Company. The silks from China had been coming, for hundreds of years, by slow caravan process across the old "Silk Street" route from Pekin to the Mediterranean, and British merchants forwarded from Alexandretta the treasures from the East, by sailing ships, to the British Isles. The discovery by Vasco da Gama of the Cape route to India ruined many of the ports in the Mediterranean, and eventually led to our evacuation of Aleppo. The remarkable developments in navigation by steamships, combined more recently with the opening of the Suez Canal, may have led us to rely too confidently upon the permanence of the superiority of our overseas communications.

The many important changes which have been taking place on land must not be overlooked. Railway communications have been vastly improved. I have journeyed from Constantinople to Ostend in three and a half days with the greatest ease ; and, when the new Asiatic lines are completed, it will be possible to travel comfortably from London to India in seven days. It is furthermore conceivable that these trunk lines will be extended without a break to Madras, when we shall have a journey of fifteen days from London to Australia—by railroad to Madras and steamship to Port Darwen.

Since the outbreak of war the Germans

have completed a new line of railway through Palestine to the Egyptian frontier, and we also have constructed a railway across the Sinaitic Desert to Palestine. There is no doubt, therefore, that the Cape-to-Cairo railway will soon be connected with the great European and Asiatic systems by a line running through Palestine to Aleppo. Then the old "Silk Street" route, so recently explored by Sir Aurel Stein, will doubtless be covered more or less with a railway system; and we may consequently anticipate the joining up of rapid communications over these many ancient highways, in practically a straight line from London to India and Australia, from Paris to Pekin, and from Petrograd to the Cape. All these will pass through Aleppo, now the headquarters of Germany's Bagdad railway schemes, which makes it a matter of vital interest and concern to the millions of the British Empire that Germany's attempts to destroy our shipping coincide with her effort to grasp by force of arms the most important lines of overland communications. It must not be forgotten that these direct overland routes will assume still greater importance with the establishment of aviation stations. We are making wondrous strides in aerial navigation, and when recent inventions are diverted to peaceful purposes it will be possible, we are told, to send mails and passengers from

London to India in three days by aerial navigation in practically a straight line. Lord Montagu suggested a route across Russia to the Punjab, but it is more probable that aviation stations will be established across the continent of Europe and down the Euphrates Valley. If the journey will take but three days from London to India, with plenty of time for rest and sleep on the way, may it not soon be possible for our colonial representatives of the contemplated Imperial Parliament to come within a week from the shores of Australia to the portals of Westminster? These tremendous changes which are now taking place amongst civilised peoples make it certain that the central portion of the Eastern Hemisphere, which forms a natural connecting link between the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, will undoubtedly become one of the most important portions of the earth's surface. These changes will facilitate the opening up of enormous countries hitherto largely closed to modern commercial enterprise or exploited only by a few adventurous Europeans. The vast populations of Asia and Africa will be able to play a better part in the development of the continents and the progress of humanity. There is plenty of room for everybody; and what a difference it may make to Europe, with the new facilities afforded to emigration and colonisation, when

the Antipodes can be brought so near to the congested areas of European lands!

(3) Is it possible, we inquire with bated breath, that so optimistic an outlook is justified by the trend of current events? Is the time ripe for such momentous changes, for the entry of mankind into a new era so markedly different from all that is gone before? An encouraging answer comes to us from Mesopotamia and the lands of the Middle East. We must look beyond this recrudescence of savagery in Europe, beyond the remarkable revolution in Russia, to the still more wonderful revolt that has taken place in the lands of Islam, where two opposing forces have long been struggling for supremacy, where despotism at last has been defeated and the forces of civilisation are once more in the ascendant. When the Kaiser in Damascus stood by the tomb of Saladin and proclaimed himself the "Defender of Islam," he fondly reckoned upon the support of the Saracens to wrench from Great Britain the most peaceful and flourishing portions of the Islamic world. Now, however, when the call has gone forth from the Ottoman Khalif that the Moslem world should rise and ruin the British Empire by all the sacred sanctions of a "Holy War," we gaze with wonder and amazement at the unprecedented spectacle of Mecca, Kerbela, the Arab race, and the bulk of the Moslem

world lending valiant support to Great Britain in the last crusade for driving the uncivilised Turk, with all his despotism, from Palestine and Mesopotamia. My meaning will be obvious to those who have lived in the East, but I must make this important point a little more clear to my readers in the West.

The city of Mecca, in Arabia, is the religious centre of nearly three hundred millions of Mohammedans. The adherents of Islam are divided into two great sects: the Sunnis, to which the Turks belong, and the Shiahs, to which the Persians and large numbers of our Indian Mohammedans belong. Kerbela, which is situated in Mesopotamia, near Babylon, is considered by the Shiahs to be the most sacred city on earth. The Sultan of Turkey is nominally the religious head or Khalif of all the Mohammedans in the world, and one well-known feature of Islamic belief is the supposed sacred obligation that the true faith must be spread by the power of the sword, whenever the Khalif calls upon his people to join the "Jehâd" or Holy War. Some of my most affectionate friends in Mesopotamia were deeply pious Mohammedans, and most of them have expressed to me their dissent from the old interpretation of the Koran which justified the call to a "Jehâd" for the purpose of massacring and robbing Jews and Christians and for the enthronement of military despotism under

the cloak of religion. Hitherto, however, the old interpretation has prevailed amongst the adherents of Islam. Untold atrocities have been committed in the name of the Prophet, and vast civilisations in Europe, North Africa, India, and the Near East have been laid desolate at different times by Moslem fanaticism. But to-day we are face to face with one of the most remarkable signs of the times. At the instigation of Germany, the religious head of the Mohammedan world proclaimed a "Holy War." Every effort was made to bring it to a successful issue; intriguers in Egypt, India, and Arabia did their best to stir up the fanaticism of religious enthusiasts, and never before have Mohammedans possessed so favourable a chance of destroying their rivals and extending the faith of Islam by the power of the sword. The Shereef of Mecca was surrounded by the Turks, who garrisoned the Holy City; he was urged to lend the sanction of that sacred place to the Sultan's demands for a religious rising.

The Mujtahid of Kerbela is the most influential leader of the Shiah sect, and his co-operation was also demanded by the Turks; yet both these prominent chiefs of the Sunnis and the Shiahs, with many other distinguished leaders like the Aga Khan, the Sultan of Zanzibar, the Sultan of Muscat, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Amir of Afghani-

stan, and the Shah of Persia, all deliberately refused to support the military despotism of the Turks, and actually took up arms in defence of the standards of modern civilisation. The Mujtahid of Kerbela sent a telegram to King George congratulating him upon the British occupation of the city of Bagdad, and the Arabic proclamation which was read to the inhabitants has been received with unbounded enthusiasm in Mesopotamia. The proclamation declared that our troops had entered Bagdad not as conquerors, but as liberators, to restore to the Arabs the heritage of their forefathers.

When I was last in Kerbela I enjoyed the privilege of a conversation with the chief Mujtahid. I happened to be visiting a former pupil of mine, now the much-respected British Consular Agent of Kerbela. The Mujtahid came into the consulate whilst I was there, and, in the course of conversation, remarked how great an admirer he was of the British race. He knew nothing of our Army and little of our Navy, except what thousands of pilgrims that came from India had told him; but from all his visitors he gathered the same impression that the British authorities were distinguished for their honesty, truthfulness, and justice. He gave me two illustrations from his own experience, one, when Sir E. O'Malley was sent all the way from Constantinople to the city of Bagdad

for the purpose of giving a fair trial to a miserable Indian Moslem who had murdered a fellow pilgrim, when the busy manager of the Imperial Ottoman Bank and other leading Englishmen of the city were cited to form the jury on this memorable occasion. What trouble and expense for the purpose of dealing justly with a miserable outcast who happened to be a British Indian subject, and what a contrast to the corruption of the Turkish courts! Then, also, he reminded me that a former King of Oudh had, at his demise, left the whole of his private fortune for the endowment of the charities of Kerbela. The annual income from these invested funds, amounting to thousands of rupees, passed annually through the British Consulate-General to the Consular Agent at Kerbela, and was faithfully distributed every year to the rightful claimants without the smallest diminution or loss. Some of it could easily have been "eaten," as the Arabic language would say. "For all the officials of the Turkish Empire," said the Mujtahid, "are gifted with 'sticky fingers.' Whenever money has to pass through their hands, and especially if it should happen to be for charitable purposes, some of it inevitably remains behind. Don't you remember," he said, "that the Sultan Abdul Hamid was once watching a European conjurer who was supposed to be swallowing silver spoons. An ambassador by

his side remarked how wonderful it was. 'But,' said the Sultan, 'we can do more wonderful things in Turkey, for I once had a Minister of Marine who swallowed a battleship. The money was provided, the battleship never appeared, and the money disappeared.' But," continued the Mujtahid, "the money from India meets with no accidents," and he congratulated me upon having established the only British schools in Mesopotamia, "for," he declared, "your pupil Mirza Hasan lives up to his education, as an honourable representative of British ideals." For twenty years we have watched the changes taking place amongst the Arabs, largely due to the leaven of civilisation which has reached them from India and Egypt; we have seen their response to the influences of modern education; they have begun to move with the times, but they have left the Turks still wallowing far behind in sixteenth-century savagery.

The Arabic-speaking world extends from Arabia, in the south, through Palestine and Mesopotamia, to Aleppo, in the north. The whole of this country must be set free from the blighting influences of Turkish despotism. If the Arabs are freed, they will gradually recover their strength, and the world will make headway with the breaking down of the one great barrier that has blocked the peoples' progress for nearly five centuries. If

the Turks are permitted to govern anybody but themselves, if they continue to command the world's important highways, then humanity will suffer, and military despotism may once more regain the ascendant. If Turkey remains anywhere south of Aleppo she would be able to force the Mohammedan world to fall back from the point of vantage which it has now safely reached, and would compel it to reassert the old interpretation of a fanatical "Jehâd." If only the Arabs can retain their freedom without the interference of European politicians they will themselves be able to deal with the delicate religious questions involved in the fall of the Ottoman Khalifate. The maintenance of peace in the East as well as the progress of Western peoples depend mainly upon the permanent expulsion of the Turk, with all his robber bands, from the world's highways, and the grant of a charter of freedom for the dwellers in Mesopotamia.

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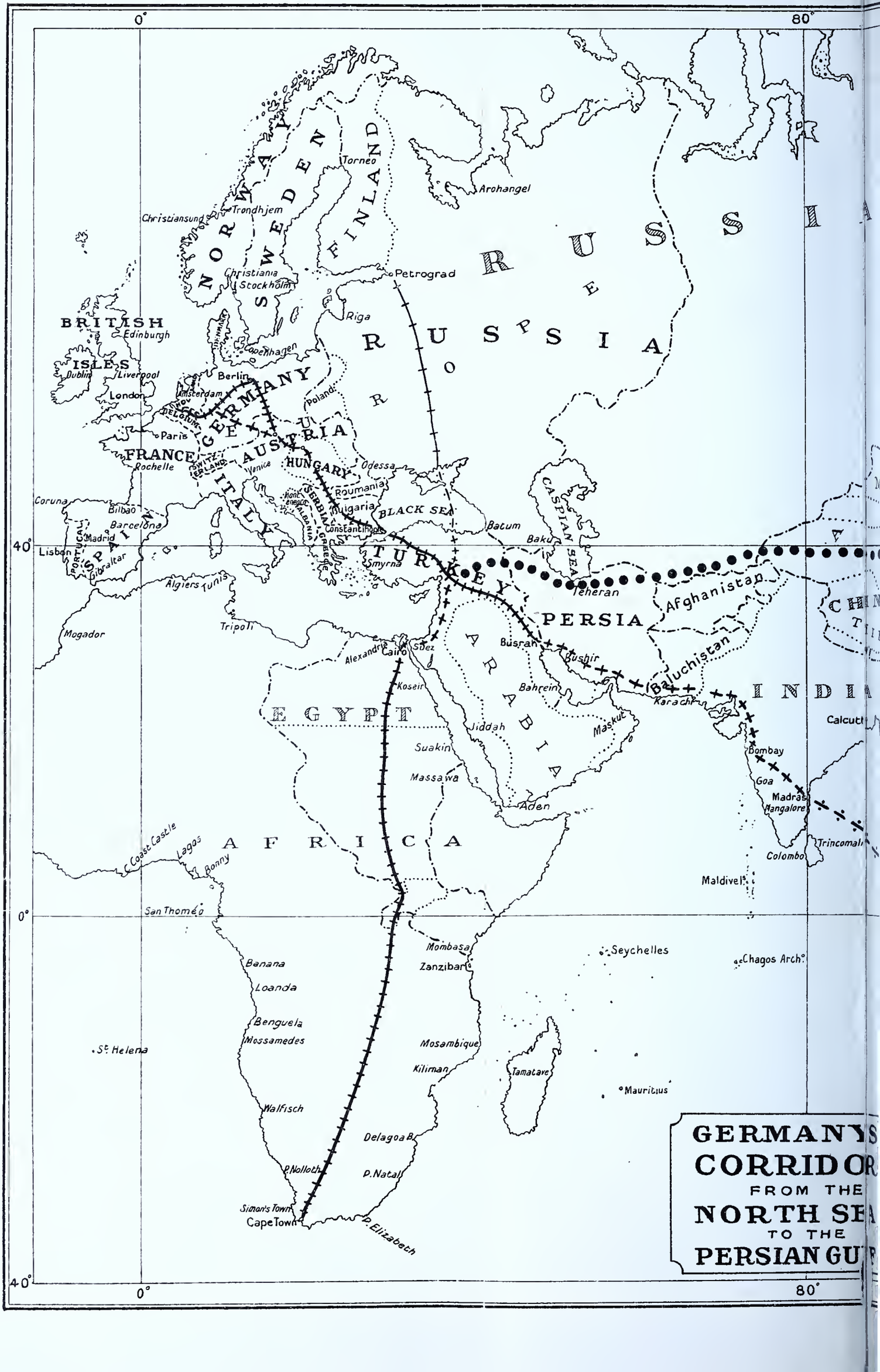
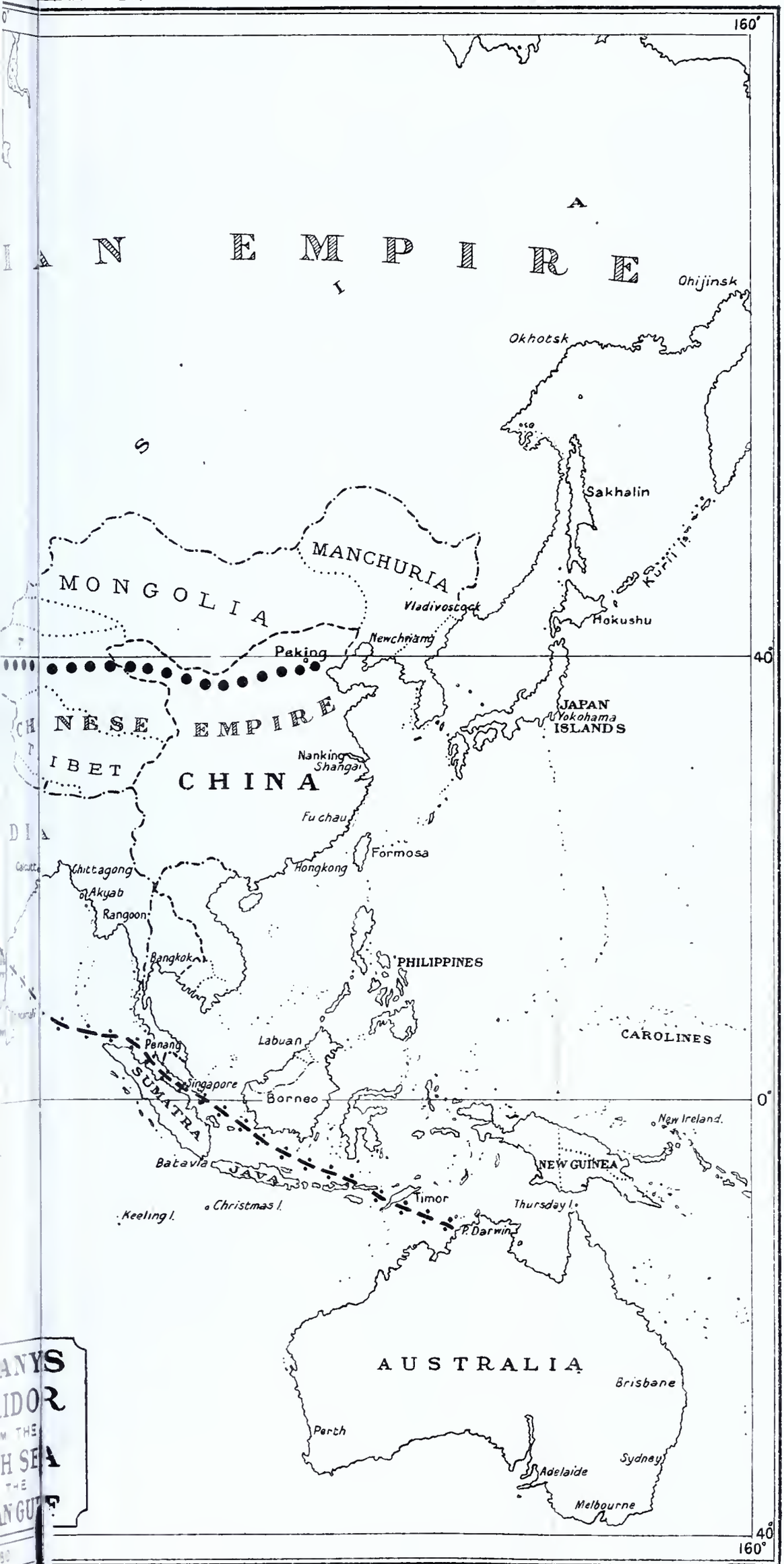
THE GERMAN DREAM "BERLIN TO BUSRA



GERMANY'S CORRIDOR FROM THE NORTH SEA TO THE PERSIAN GU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